

The Doctrine of the Last Things

from *Great Doctrines of the Bible* by William Evans

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

Under this caption is included the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, although, as will be seen later, they do not occur at the same time.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF A RESURRECTION CLEARLY TAUGHT IN THE SCRIPTURES.

1. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

It is set forth in various ways:

In Word: Job 19:25-27—"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." Also Psa. 16:9; 17:15; Dan. 12:1-3.

In Figure: Gen. 22:5 with Heb. 11:19—"Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

In Prophecy: Isa. 26:19—"Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust." The words "men" and "together with" may be omitted—"Thy dead (ones) shall live." These words are Jehovah's answer to Israel's wail as recorded in v. 17, 18. Even if they refer to resurrection of Israel as a nation, they yet teach a bodily resurrection. See also Hosea 13:14.

In Reality: 1 Kings 17 (Elijah); 2 Kings 4:32-35 (Elisha and the Shunamite's son); 13:21 (Resurrection through contact with the dead bones of Elisha).

The Old Testament therefore distinctly teaches the resurrection of the body. Mark 9:10, which might seem to indicate that the apostles did not know of a bodily resurrection, is accounted for by their unwillingness to believe in a crucified Christ.

2. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

In Word: Note the teaching of Jesus in John 5:28, 29; c. 6 entire, note especially v. 39, 40, 44, 54; Luke 14:13, 14; 20:35, 36. The teaching of

the apostles: Paul, Acts, 24:15; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:14-16; Phil. 3:11; John, Rev. 20:4-6; 13.

In Reality: The resurrection of saints (Matt. 27:52, 53); of Lazarus (John 11); of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28). Our Lord's resurrection assured them of what till then had been a hope imperfectly supported by Scriptural warrant, and contested by the Sadducees. It enlarged that hope (1 Pet. 1:3), and brought the doctrine of the resurrection to the front (1 Cor. 15).

II. THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION.

1. A LITERAL RESURRECTION OF THE BODIES OF ALL MEN—A UNIVERSAL RESURRECTION.

John 5:28—"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth." 1 Cor. 15:22—"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The apostle is speaking of physical death in Adam, and physical resurrection in Christ.

Revelation 20:12, and 2 Corinthians 5:10 both show the necessity of the raising of the body in order that judgment may take place according to things done in the body. See also Job's hope (19:25-27); David's hope (Psa. 16:9).

An objection is sometimes made to the effect that we literalize these scriptures which are intended to be metaphorical and spiritual. To this we reply: While the exact phrase, "resurrection of the body," does not occur in the Bible, yet these scriptures clearly teach a physical rather than a spiritual resurrection. Indeed John 5:25-29 draws a sharp contrast between a spiritual (v. 25) and a literal (v. 28) resurrection. See also Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:13-17. 2 Tim. 2:18—"Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is passed already," indicates that the early church believed in a literal resurrection. Surely there is no reference here to a spiritual resurrection such as we read of in Ephesians 5:14. Acts 24:15 speaks of a resurrection of the just and the unjust—this cannot refer to a spiritual resurrection surely. If the resurrection were spiritual then in the future state every man would have two spirits—the spirit he has here, and the spirit he would receive at the resurrection. The term "spiritual body" describes, not so much the body itself, as its nature. The "spiritual body" is body, not spirit, hence should not be considered as defining body. By the term "spiritual body" is meant the body spiritualized. So there is a natural body—a body adapted and designed for the use of the soul; and there is a spiritual body—a body adapted for the use of the spirit in the

resurrection day.

2. THE REDEMPTION OF THE BODY IS INCLUDED IN OUR COMPLETE REDEMPTION.

Rom. 8:11-23—"And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (v. 23). See also 1 Cor. 6:13-20. In John 6:39 and Job 19:25-27 we are taught that the dust into which our bodies have decayed will be quickened, which indicates a physical resurrection.

This conception of the value of the body is doubtless what leads to the Christian's care for his dead loved ones and their graves. The believer's present body, which is called "the body of his humiliation" (Phil. 3:21) is not yet fitted for entrance into the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50). Paul's hope is not for a deliverance from the body, but the redemption of it (2 Cor. 5:4).

3. THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION BODY.

a) In General.

Because the Scripture teaches a literal resurrection of the body it is not necessary to insist on the literal resurrection of the identical body—hair, tooth, and nail—that was laid under the ground. The idea that at the resurrection we are to see hands flying across the sea to join the body, etc., finds no corroboration in the Scriptures. Such an idea is not necessary in order to be true to the Bible teaching. Mere human analogy ought to teach us this (1 Cor. 15:36, 37)—"thou sowest not that body which shall be." The identity is preserved—that is all that we need to insist upon. What that identity tie is we may not yet know. After all it is not so much a question of material identity as of glorified individuality. The growth of the seed shows that there may be personal identity under a complete change of physical conditions.

Four things may be said about the resurrection body: first, it is not necessarily identical with that which descended into the grave; second, it will have some organic connection with that which descended into the grave; third, it will be a body which God, in His sovereignty, will bestow; fourth, it will be a body which will be a vast improvement over the old one.

b) The Body of the Believer.

Phil. 3:21 (R.V.)—"Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory,

according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself." See also 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:49.

What was the nature and likeness of Christ's resurrection body which our resurrection body is to resemble? It was a real body (Luke 24:39); recognizable (Luke 24:31; John 20:16); powerful (John 20:19).

Summing up these passages, we may say that the resurrection body of the believer will be like the glorified body of Christ.

Characteristics of the believer's resurrection body as set forth in 1 Cor. 15:

It is not flesh and blood (v. 50, 51; cf. Heb. 2:14; 2 Cor. 5:1-6; Luke 24:39)—"flesh and bones," so not pure spirit; a real body.

It is incorruptible (v. 42)—no decay, sickness, pain.

It is glorious (v. 43), cf. the Transfiguration (Matt. 17); Rev. 1:13-17. It has been said that Adam and Eve, in their unfallen state, possessed a glorious body. The face of Stephen was glorious in his death (Acts 6:15). 2 Cor. 3:18.

It is powerful (v. 43)—not tired, or weak; no lassitude; cf. now "spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"; not so then.

It is a spiritual body (v. 44). Here the soul is the life of the body; there the spirit will be the life of the body.

It is heavenly (v. 47-49).

c) The Resurrection Body of the Unbeliever.

The Scriptures are strangely silent on this subject. It is worthy of note that in the genealogies of Genesis 5 no age is attached to the names of those who were not in the chosen line. Is there a purpose here to ignore the wicked? In the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus no name is given to the godless rich man; why?

III. THE TIME OF THE RESURRECTION.

1. THE RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

John 6:39, 40, 44—"The last day." This does not mean a day of twenty-four hours, but a period of time. It will be safe, usually, to limit the word "day" to a period of twenty-four hours only where numeral, ordinal, or cardinal occurs in connection therewith, like "fourth day," etc. When the "day of grace," "day of judgment," "this

thy day," etc., are mentioned, they refer to periods of time either long or short, as the case may be.

1 Cor. 15:23—"But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming." 1 Thess. 4:14-17. In both these passages the resurrection of the believer is connected with the coming of Christ. This event ushers in the last day; it is treated as a separate and distinct thing.

2. THE RESURRECTION OF THE WICKED.

As there is a difference in the issue (John 5:28, 29; Dan. 12:2, cf. literal Hebrew rendering below) so there is as to time between the resurrection of the righteous and that of the wicked.

Phil. 3:11—"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of (lit. out of) the dead." It was no incentive to Paul simply to be assured that he would be raised from the dead; for he knew that all men would be thus raised. What Paul was striving for was to be counted worthy of that first resurrection—of the righteous from among the wicked. The resurrection "out from among" the dead is the resurrection unto life and glory; the resurrection "of" the dead is to shame and contempt everlasting.

1 Cor. 15:21-24. Note the expressions used, and their meaning: "Then," meaning the next in order, the Greek denoting sequence, not simultaneousness—each in his own cohort, battalion, brigade (cf. Mark 4:28—"First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear"). Nineteen hundred years have already elapsed between "Christ the firstfruits" and "they that are Christ's." How many years will elapse between the resurrection of "they that are Christ's" and that of the wicked ("the end") we may not be able to definitely state, but certainly long enough for Christ to have "put all enemies under his feet" (v. 25). Three groups or ranks are here mentioned: "Christ," "they that are Christ's," "the end" (the resurrection of the wicked). (Cf. v. 5, 6, 7—"Seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that ... after that ... then ... and last of all he was seen of me also.") First Christ, afterwards (later than) "they that are Christ's" then (positively meaning afterwards, a new era which takes place after an interval) "cometh the end."

Dan. 12:2—"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some (lit. those who awake at this time) to everlasting life, and some (lit. those who do not awake at this time) to shame and everlasting contempt." Some of the most eminent Hebrew scholars translate this passage as follows: "And (at that time) many (of thy people) shall awake (or be separated) out from among the sleepers in

the earth dust. These (who awake) shall be unto life eternal, but those (who do not awake at that time) shall be unto contempt and shame everlasting." It seems clear from this passage that all do not awake at one (this) time, but only as many as are written in the book (12:1).

Revelation 20:4-6 shows that at least a thousand years—whatever period of time may be thereby designated—elapses between the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked.

John 5:28, 29; Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:12 all show that the resurrection of the wicked is always connected with the judgment, and that takes place at the close and not at the beginning of the Day of the Lord.

Whatever difficulties may present themselves in connection with the resurrection, whatever obstacles of a miraculous or supernatural nature may present themselves in connection therewith are to be met by remembering the truth enunciated by Christ in connection with this very subject: Matt. 22:29—"Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." (Cf. v. 23.—"The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection," etc., and the following verses for the setting of v. 29.)

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